Los Angeles Times Magazine

WESTSIDE CRUDE

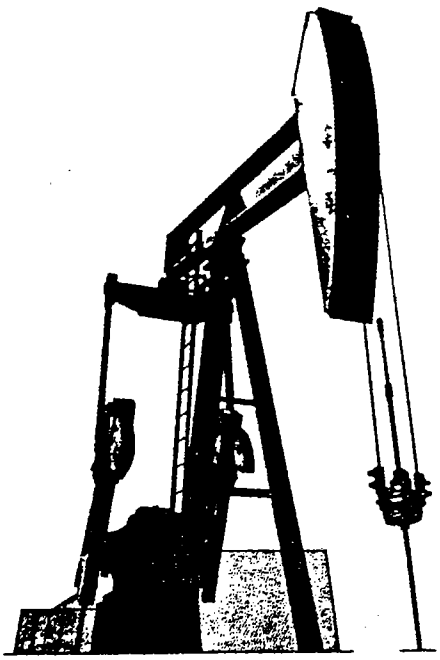
The Political War Over Palisades Oil Drilling and an Analysis of What's at Stake for L.A.

THE HILLY STREETS below Dodger Stadium are more than 20 miles from the steep Pacific Palisades bluffs that face the Pacific Coast Highway and the sand and surf of Will Rogers State Beach. But these two areas of the city—one Asian, Latino and down at the heels, the other Westside, white and rich—have something in common. They both sit on oil fields. However, while drilling at the Westside site has been fiercely debated for two decades, oil has been pumped from the downtown field for almost 90 years, with the wells visible to the thousands who drive up Stadium Way to Dodger games. And few people, especially those with influence, have objected. Because of that, these two parts of town have become symbols of the volatile issues surfacing in an expensive and potentially divisive city election this November over whether Occidental Petroleum Corp. should be allowed to drill for oil from a spot under the bluffs of the Palisades.

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Gloria Molina, who represents the poor hillsides on the downtown side of the stadium, is keenly aware of the symbolism of the two neighborhoods. She opposes Pacific Palisades oil drilling on environmental grounds, but wonders why there hasn't been a similar protest about wells in her area. "We did not have an opportunity to participate when the oil-drilling sites were found years ago and the machinery [was] put in," she says. "I think the Palisades people think it is just their issue. Someone said that this was different because it was protecting the coastline. I find that an elitist sentiment."

Molina is a small, intense, stubbornly independent Latina who got her job by challenging the boys in the male-dominated politics of the barrio. They opposed her candidacy for the State Assembly, but Molina won anyway. After treating Assembly Speaker Willie L. Brown's operation with gutsy irreverence for five years, Molina returned home to run in a new 1st City Council District, created in a federal government effort to increase the council's Latino representation.

In the summer of 1986, before Molina became city councilwoman, Petroleum Land Services Co. of Bakersfield obtained, with little notice, permission from the City Council to drill two exploratory oil wells in a parking lot near Elysian Park, just across Stadium Way from the Dodgers' advance-sale ticket office. There are existing wells throughout Molina's district, which sits on the city's first great oil discovery, the Los Angeles City Field, found in 1892. At Stadium Way and Coronel Street, Chavez Development Well No. 6 is pumping oil, emitting a quiet



BY BILL BOYARSKY

Illustrated by Brian Zick

Mickey Kantor directs the pro-drilling campaign: "Every neighborhood in the city has shared its resources. Why is this neighborhood different?" Below, Occidental's model of a well site.

"thump" every five seconds. Across the street, behind a fence painted "Go Big Blue, Go Dodgers," four pumps and two tanks sit on a hillside.

The area was just emerging from years of being part of a political no man's land. Some of the city's poorest residents live in the neighborhood, a part of a great swath of the central city running from prosperous Mt. Washington south through the packed, miserable slum apartments housing Central American immigrants around the Santa Monica Freeway. It was a part of town split among three City Council districts and had, in practice, been represented by no one. Even community groups had difficulty following the drilling issue.

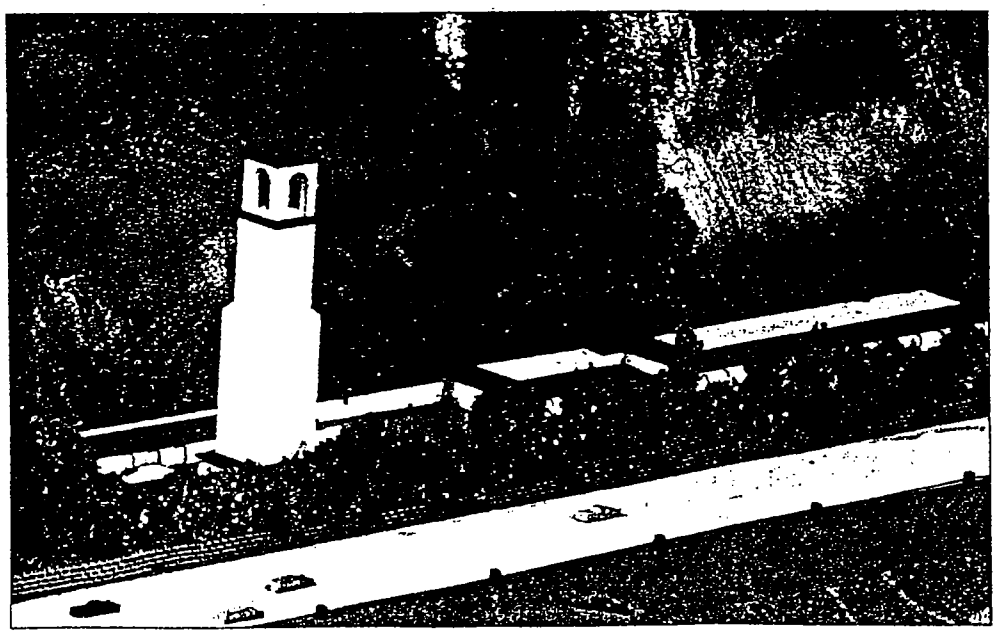
"We were not aware of the permit process, and I guess it just slipped through," says Sallie Neubauer, president of the Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park, which has been working for more than two decades to preserve the 575-acre park. Neubauer's group had successfully resisted an attempt by Occidental to drill there in the 1970s, and this time members feared that if Petroleum Services hit oil, the park would be threatened.

"We were suspicious that later on [oil companies] might want to get into the park," she says. "This is the battle the citizens' committee has been fighting for more than 20 years—to keep the park for the people. And the fact that we live in a minority neighborhood makes it harder. Many of the people who use the park speak little English, and many don't speak it at all. A few years ago, we were pushing to get the Recreation and Parks Department to improve the irrigation. We got hundreds of signatures from people using the park. Then we sent membership solicitations to about 200 of them and received 150 back marked 'Not deliverable.' That told us many were afraid to reply because of their alien status. So it's an area that doesn't have many votes, and we have a tough job doing what we do."

But, in February, 1987, the area was made part of the new 1st Council District, and Molina was elected the district's councilwoman. Within a few months, she had taken control of the neglected area and the issue of oil drilling. "We brought it to Molina's attention and she took our side," Neubauer says.

By that time, the Petroleum Land Services project had quietly, but speedily, moved through the city bureaucracy. The staff of the city Recreation and Parks Department, which owned the mineral rights in the area, had recommended granting a lease to the company and incorrectly said that Molina supported the action. But, in a letter sent to the department in October, 1987, she sharply replied: "As I do not support the city's leasing this land for oil exploration at this time and since the original staff report was issued in error, I request that you amend the report to delete my support of the staff recommendation." Eventually, the department declined to sign a lease. Later, the company pulled out—a city official said he understood oil had not been found.

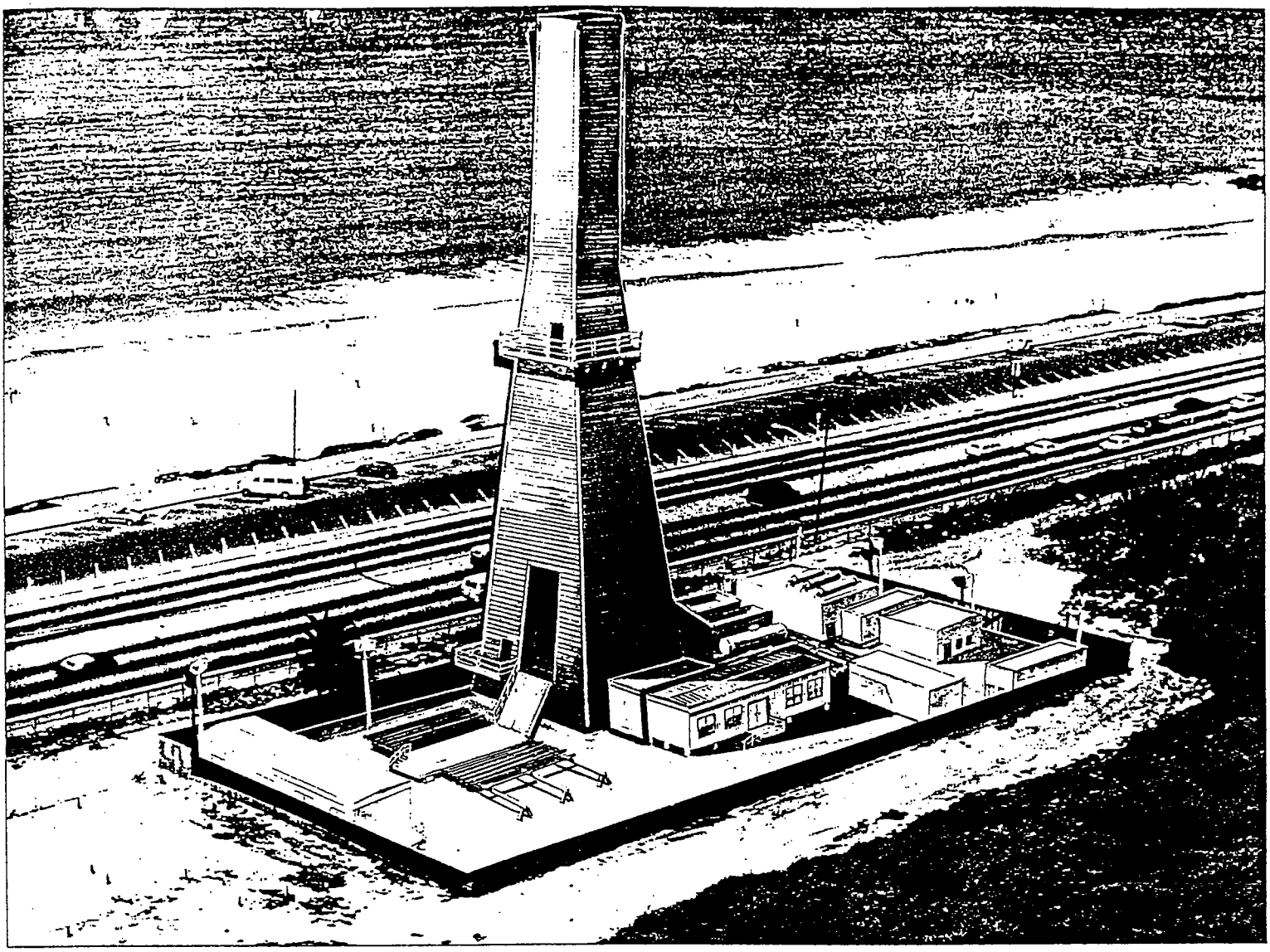
The quiet, brief fight just faded away.



A Question of Privilege

In contrast, opposition to the Palisades oil drilling has been a big local news story since 1970, when residents formed No Oil Inc. Its members, for the most part, were affluent, well-educated and politically sophisticated. They knew how to make news by alerting the media to their meetings or providing reporters with information re-

Photograph, upper left: Ted Dayton



Artist's depiction, prepared by No Oil, of the proposed drilling site at the foot of the Pacific Palisades bluffs.

searched from City Hall files by No Oil volunteers. And, although amateurs, they knew how to lobby public officials. This was just after the massive Santa Barbara oil spill in 1969, and politicians were becoming aware of the political power of the environmental movement. Over the years, the No Oil cause, with its cry of "Save the beach!" has continued to be a strong and publicized political force.

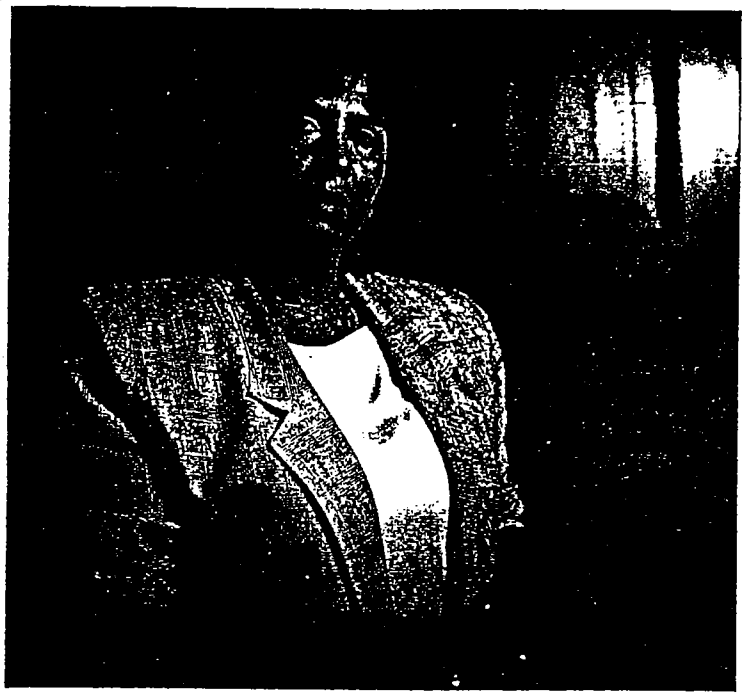
The stark difference between the relative obscurity of the Elysian Park area project and the constant spotlight on the Palisades drilling proposal has raised an issue that goes beyond the environmental questions. It is an issue of fairness.

The issue has been raised by the Occidental team, which is trying to capitalize on resentment against the wealthy Palisades and the Westside. Because of that, the election has become more than a fight over an oil-drilling project and the sanctity of the beaches. The vote now involves the very structure of society in a new Los Angeles—relationships among affluent neighborhoods and poor ones; among whites, blacks, Asians and Latinos; among Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Jews; among large numbers of new immigrants and settled residents, among the many groups whose diversity has eliminated all but the memories of the predominantly white, middle-class, suburban Los Angeles of a few decades ago.

Some contend that such a campaign could be very divisive. In 1973, the city, still affected by the 1965 Watts riots, voted for racial peace when it elected Tom Bradley mayor. Since then, a liberal Democratic coalition, dominated by black and Jewish leaders and voters, has controlled politics in the city. Whenever racial peace was threatened, as during the school-integration crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, black and Jewish leaders got together and smoothed things over.

But that alliance is creaking. Crisis control has become more complicated than in the days when a few leaders could meet at the Jewish Federation Council office or the Urban League headquarters and work things out. Latinos, never fully represented, are demanding a place at the table.

Bill Boyarsky, Times city-county bureau chief, has been covering Southern California politics since 1970.



Black voting power is being diluted in once heavily black South-Central Los Angeles by the arrival of Latinos—and by the exodus of some middle-class blacks to the suburbs. The Asian population and its political participation are increasing.

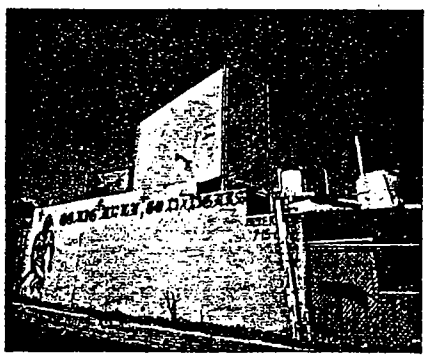
The latest oil campaign comes just as these changes are taking place. Neil Sandberg, western regional director of the American Jewish Committee, fears increased tension next year during the mayoral race between Bradley, who is black, and City Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky, who is Jewish. That concern was clear early in the campaign when I talked to Sandberg, a reserved and thoughtful man who has worked for many years to ease racial tensions. "I am convinced that neither Mayor Bradley nor Zev Yaroslavsky would ever utter a racist comment because of their own personal characters and because of their own good sense as politicians," he said. "It would be harmful to them. And yet there are undisciplined elements in both communities who might well say or do things that could be construed as racist."

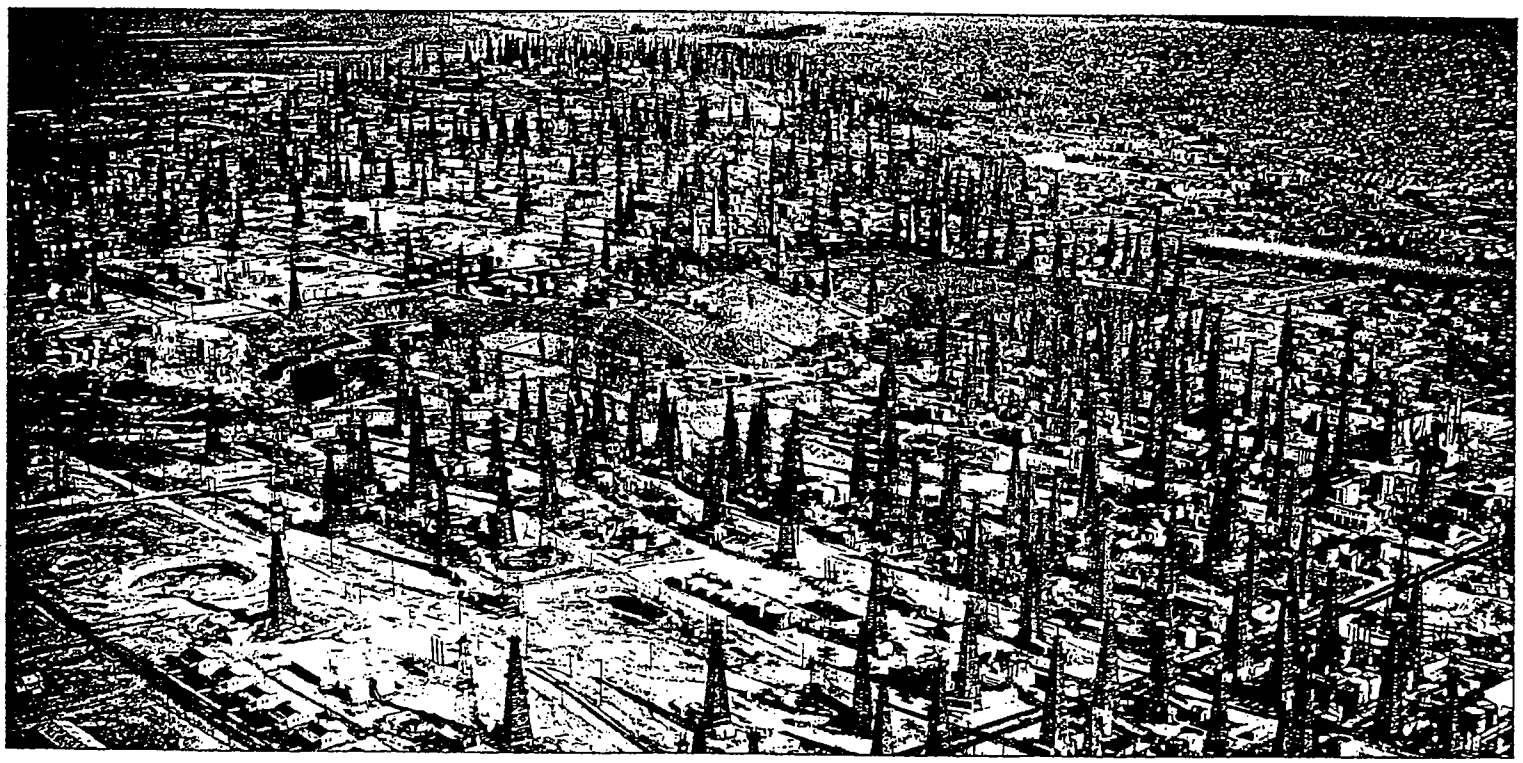
ON THE BALLOT: DUELING MEASURES

THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY is just the latest chapter in a long fight that began in August, 1966, when Occidental began drilling an exploratory well near Elder Street and Entrada Drive in Pacific Palisades. By September, the company said it found oil at 9,271 feet.

No Oil has fought the project on environmental grounds, charging that it would wreck the nearby beach. The group said that it was trying to save the beach for the entire city, rich and poor. The Occidental foes also emphasized safety issues, pointing out that there was a huge landslide at the

Councilwoman Gloria Molina, above, opposes the Palisades drilling but says that the Westside protests against it smack of elitism. For decades, and with little debate, oil has been pumped from throughout her 1st District, including site at right, near Dodger Stadium.





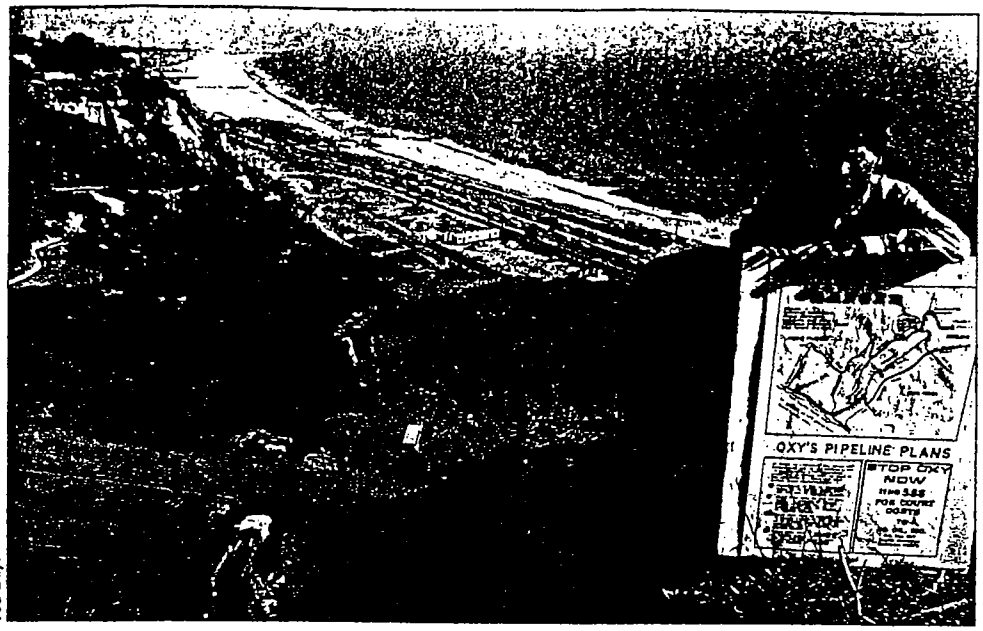
A look at Signal Hill 50 years ago shows the vast extent of Los Angeles oil fields, some of which are still untapped.

Photographs, top and center: Rosemary Kaul; bottom: Los Angeles Times

drilling site in 1958. The slide is visible from the highway; Pacific Coast Highway curves around it at Will Rogers State Beach.

Occidental's campaign, waged first before government agencies, contained some of the basic elements now being presented to the voters. It characterized its foes as a small group of elitists. And the company said No Oil, by opposing the project, was denying the city additional revenues that could be useful to all of Los Angeles—rich and poor—for more police officers, firefighters and other municipal services.

The issue will appear as two measures on the Nov. 8 ballot. One is Proposition O, which would stop Occidental's project by banning new oil drilling within 1,000 yards of the beaches and repealing the ordinances, passed by the Los Angeles City Council and signed by Bradley, that authorized Occidental's drilling. It is being backed by No Oil, environmental groups, Yaroslavsky and Councilman Marvin Braude, whose district includes the Palisades and who has been fighting the proposal from the beginning. The two councilmen have loaned the Prop. O campaign $152,000, most of it from Yaroslavsky's campaign funds, and about $100,000 has come from smaller contributions.



Ted Dayton

Roger Diamond, a founder of No Oil: "The people who use the beaches are the people from the inner city, so I think their interests are more at stake than the residents'."

The second measure, Proposition P, is backed by Occidental, although the actual campaign organization for the initiative is called the Los Angeles Public and Coastal Protection Committee. According to its last report to the city, Occidental has contributed $335,000 of the $445,000 the committee has raised so far. Both sides are expected to raise considerably more money. There is no estimate of what the battle will cost, although it may end up as the most expensive ballot proposition campaign in city history.

Prop. P specifically authorizes the Palisades project and directs city officials to allocate city revenues from the drilling to police, fire, paramedics and other government services. But such a stipulation is not binding. The measure also tells city officials that they should reiterate their longstanding policy of opposing oil drilling in Santa Monica Bay. That provision has been attacked as deceptive by Occidental foes, who say it is an attempt to mislead voters into thinking the measure is an anti-oil initiative.

INSIDE THE OCCIDENTAL CAMPAIGN

A SURVEY BY The Times Poll in June, 1987, indicated the immensity of the task facing Occidental. Asked if they agreed or disagreed "with Tom Bradley about permitting oil drilling offshore from Pacific Palisades," 39% disagreed, 17% agreed, 10% did not know, and 34% were unaware of the issue.

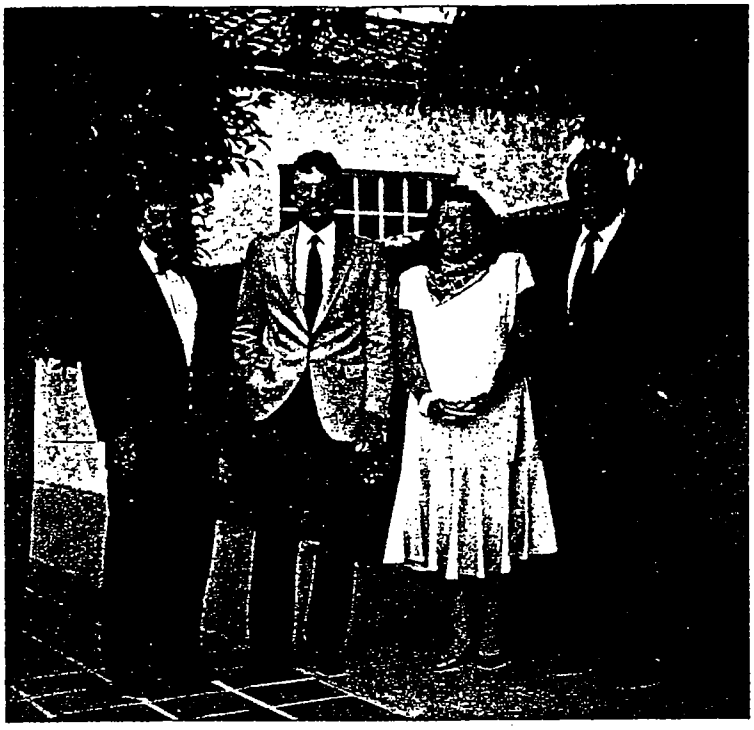
Opposition was strongest among Jewish voters, which probably reflected that the strongly Jewish Westside is a center of opposition. More than 47% of the Latinos and 41% of the blacks, targets of Occidental's pro-drilling campaign, were unaware of the issue. On the Westside, 63% disagreed, contrasted with 38% in the northern San Fernando Valley, 36% in the southern San Fernando Valley and 27% in South Los Angeles. Oil-drilling backers said the question was misleading in that Occidental plans to drill into the Palisades, rather than offshore. But one campaign strategist said a poll for the pro-drilling side indicated that "we have a much tougher burden to explain our side."

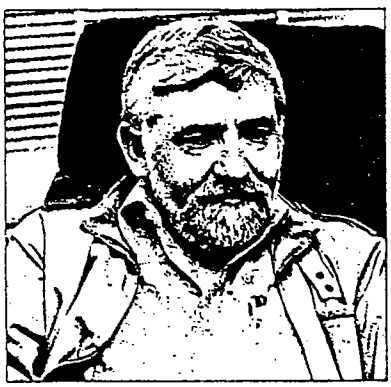
Over the years, No Oil, with its cry of 'Save the beach!' has been a strong and publicized political force.

The explaining is being done by spokespersons such as Mickey Kantor, a lawyer directing the pro-oil drilling campaign as a member of the executive committee of the Los Angeles Public and Coastal Protection Committee.

"Selfishness, strictly selfishness," says Kantor of the motivations of Occidental opponents.

Kantor is an articulate Southerner whose trace of a drawl partially hides an intense, driven manner. As a young lawyer, he worked in the War on Poverty with Sargent Shriver, then came to California and became a close political counselor to Sen. Alan Cranston and former Gov. Jerry Brown. In recent years, he and his law firm, Manatt, Phelps, Rothenberg & Phillips, have become leaders in the increasingly lucrative occupation of representing businesses in Los Angeles City Hall. He says he is "neither embarrassed nor concerned about the criticism"





The consulting team fashioning the pro-drilling campaign strategy includes, above from left, Richard Lichtenstein, Richard Maullin, Coleen Harmon and Joseph Cerrell. The anti-drilling campaign is masterminded by political consultants Michael Berman, left, and Carl D'Agostino, below. The publication last month of confidential memos prepared by Berman and D'Agostino for Zev Yaroslavsky was peripheral to the oil issue, but it pointed up the sensitive state of the city's race relations.

directed at him and Occidental for turning an environmental issue into a class issue. And he says he does not think it conflicts with his liberal past. "I have fought all my life for civil rights," he says. There is, he says, "a difference between a civil-rights liberal and environmental liberals.

"We have drilled for oil for 97 years, all over the city. . . . The fact is, every neighborhood in the city has shared its resources," he says. "Why is this neighborhood different? Why does it stand alone? . . . I believe this is the only source of oil and gas that has not been exploited. Where is the equity? Why is Watts different from the Palisades? Why is San Pedro different than the Palisades?" He says the public attention given the Palisades oil issue reminds him of when a young woman was killed in the cross fire of rival gangs in Westwood. "There was a huge outcry by public officials in West L.A.," he says, "but there are gang killings all the time in South-Central."

William Robertson, secretary-treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, leads a life that is divided between the Westside homes of the city's political elite, downtown's corporate offices and the working men and women who are his constituency. "Oil drilling was going on in all districts and never a voice was raised against it but [by] people I would describe as the affluent people on the Westside. Elitists, with loud voices, were taking up the banner to keep oil drilling out of their districts, " he says. "If these people had real concerns, they should have voiced them about these other oil-drilling districts."

Robertson, Kantor and other Occidental advocates are troubled when asked if they think that their strategy will increase racial and class tensions in the city. It is a particularly disturbing question for many of them, considering their deep involvement in past liberal campaigns that have emphasized racial justice. One such campaigner is Joseph Cerrell, a political-campaign consultant and press spokesman who waged many battles for the late Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey, one of the Democratic Party's greatest advocates of civil rights.

One day in his office in the Larchmont neighborhood, I asked Cerrell, a pro-oil committee inner-circle member, if there is "a certain hostile tone" to the campaign, an attempt to use "the elitist issue to exacerbate class differences, class tensions, ethnic tensions."

"Let me put it this way," Cerrell replied. "I would suggest the proponents of the measure shouldn't have put it on the ballot, rather than fomenting this particular problem. Why shouldn't all areas of the city have drilling? . . . I am not suggesting we all have to look like Wilmington, but if we are worrying about pitting one area against the other, I think everyone should pitch in and handle their share of it. . . . I don't think it is going to exacerbate the racial thing, it is going to exacerbate . . . the rest of the city vs. the Westside."

"The Westside is mostly white, tends to be affluent and is heavily Jewish? Does that worry you?"

"No, because they should be carrying their fair share of the burden," Cerrell said.

"You might set race against race, blacks against whites, Latinos and blacks against Jews."

"I don't think it is a racial conflict," he replied.

"Is it a class conflict?"

"To a lesser degree," he said. "But I don't see any great racial situation in that. There are blacks who live on the Westside. There are Hispanics who live on the Westside. There is just no reason why the elitists have

Top to bottom: Don Saban; Los Angeles Times; Los Angeles Times

to be protected from all the burdens the rest of the city of Los Angeles carries."

THE OPPOSITION'S FEARS

BUT OCCIDENTAL OPPONENTS and community leaders neutral in the struggle are chilled by that tone, fearing that such words will stir Los Angeles' increasingly delicate ethnic, religious and economic mix. This is now a city where Buddhist temples and Muslim mosques are springing up in neighborhoods that once only knew churches or an occasional synagogue. Relations between blacks and Jews, old political allies in the civil-rights movement, seem particularly edgy.

Sandberg of the American Jewish Committee is concerned. He worries that enmity between blacks and Jews, exacerbated during the Rev. Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign, will be made worse.

"To some extent, Jews have been portrayed as a very successful and influential group, and there is much truth to that portrayal," Sandberg says. "This tends to mask the fact that we have a reasonably normal Jewish population here, second-largest Jewish community in the world, with 500,000 Jews.

"There are almost 100,000 Jews who are just above the poverty line, and they are not all older people. They are distributed by age. There are Jewish successes and Jewish failures, but the stereotype continues that we're the success group. Blacks, Hispanics and others are portrayed as the groups that have problems or economic disadvantage. I think that is generally a fair portrayal. But what happens is on these economic issues, there is a tendency to say the haves are selfish and oppose the kind of growth that will help the have-nots . . . and then go beyond that and to say directly or to imply that the haves are Jews and the have-nots are minorities. When you get to that point, I think you are being rather destructive in helping with good relations."

Or, as City Councilwoman Ruth Galanter, an oil-drilling opponent says: "An oil well and a hillside are neither Jewish nor black. The issue in this campaign is: Are we going to permit a major corporation to buy its way into doing something that is otherwise inappropriate? That has nothing to do with race or class. It has to do with public policy and the degree of concern that we as a community feel about our physical environment."

But in August, there was another incident, only peripheral to the oil issue, that showed how sensitive race relations, already stirred up by such issues as parity in police protection in affluent and poor neighborhoods, have become. It was the publication in The Times of the "BAD memo," named for the authors, (Michael) Berman and (Carl) D'Agostino. The two are political consultants who were unofficially advising anti-oil leader Yaroslavsky in his potential mayoral campaign against Bradley and also directing the anti-drilling campaign.

In telling Yaroslavsky how he should shape up for his coming race against Bradley, the memo used blunt, colorful language for which Berman has become locally famous, such as, "You've got 50 IQ points on [Bradley], (and that's no compliment)." Environmentalists were called "tree huggers." A strong fund-raising drive was proposed for Yaroslavsky: "The Yaroslavsky campaign becomes the United Jewish Appeal."

Jews were embarrassed. "I, as a Jew, feel insulted by those guys," says Stanley Treitel, a grass-roots community leader in the Westside's heavily Jewish Beverly-Fairfax district. Many black leaders, especially those who had clashed with the Berman-D'Agostino operation, were furious.

"Most black elected officials are sympathetic and vote with the environmentalists," says Assemblywoman Maxine Waters, (D-Los Angeles). "Most of us have known for a long time that the environmentalists are, and for the most part have been, white, middle-class groups who have not really either shown a lot of concern about the black community or black issues. Yet we have continued to give support, whether they were talking about timber or forest land or oil drilling, none of which we have directly been affected by. . . . I want to tell you I may very well support the oil drilling. I feel such a need to assert independence from this kind of crap, and I feel such a need for the black community not to be led on by someone else's agenda and not even knowing what the agenda was."

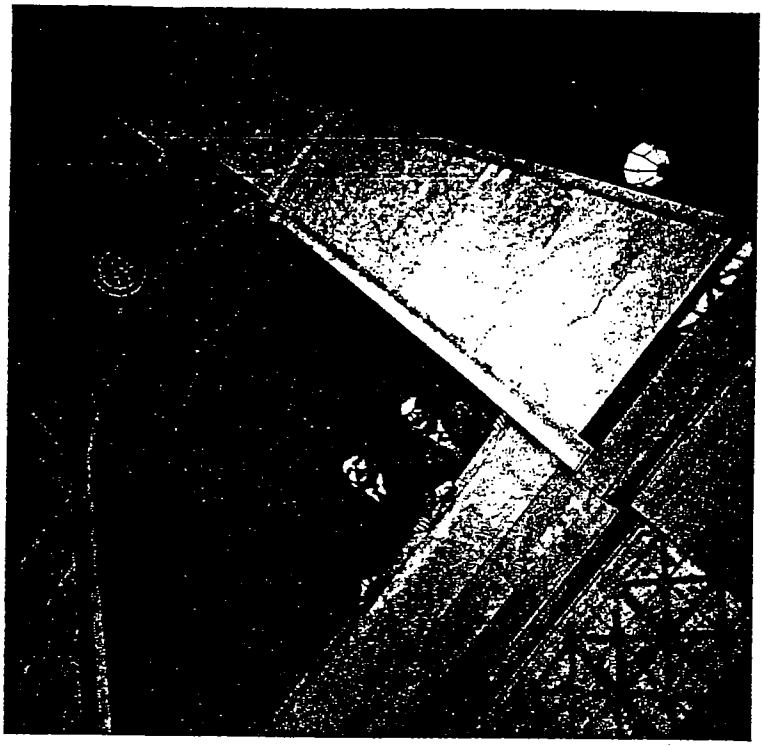
Molina, too, was angry. "As I read through it, I thought it was part of the whole cynical nature of the political technicians. One of the things that ran through my mind was 'Where were we [the Latino community]?' They didn't even insult us. We didn't even count. The mayoral race is going to be a black-Jewish thing."

The possibility that the Occidental side may be tapping fertile ground in its Westside bashing was raised in a conversation with a liberal activist who might be expected to violently oppose oil drilling. He is Gary Blasi, an attorney for Legal Aid. Representing the poor in court and against government agencies, he deals with players on both sides. He is also a resident of Echo Park, part of Molina's district just west of Dodger Stadium.

We talked one morning as the campaign was beginning. "Do you give a damn about the Palisades oil project?" I asked.

"Not really," he said. "I drive by an oil well every morning. It's been there for 50 years. I sort of like it. The only thing I don't like about it is the mineral rights don't come with my house so someone else gets the royalties from it. I didn't like them drilling in Elysian Park, and you look at the kind of attention Elysian Park gets and it is a disgrace, except for the little enclave around the lodge, which is really well maintained. You compare that park with a park on the Westside and there is no comparison on the amount of resources.

"I care about oil wells in the Santa Barbara Channel. I do think the coastline belongs to everybody. I don't like looking at the stuff when I drive up the coast. But in terms of big issues for poor folks or for me, a homeowner in Echo Park, it is not on my top 10 list of issues."



Councilmen Zev Yaroslavsky, left, and Marvin Braude have contributed $152,000 to the effort to foil Occidental.

ELITISTS? HOW THE WESTSIDE FEELS

BUT, ACROSS TOWN on the Westside, there are strong objections to the charges of elitism.

Councilwoman Galanter, who represents an area encompassing Venice, Westchester and Crenshaw, says the elitist charge is misleading. "I don't think that's the issue," she says. "The fact that the hillside in question is located in an area of relatively affluent residents I don't think is a relevant issue. If it were a hillside next to the Coast Highway, next to a resource that everybody depends on, and it were in a poor area, I would feel exactly the same way about it.

"Let's acknowledge that we don't do as well in some areas as we do in other areas in creating the environment everybody would like to live in," she says. "I don't think there is any question about that. We have not done as well in providing housing, providing jobs accessible to where housing is. But there are two ways to go. One way is to say we should clean up the environment for everybody, which is what I say. The other way is to say if we haven't cleaned it up in East Los Angeles or South-Central, we shouldn't clean it up anywhere. I don't think that is an option."

Galanter adds another factor that rarely surfaces in the discussion: Along with the wealth of the Westside comes social concern. "If you look at the contributors to a lot of organizations which help [social causes], you find a lot of those people," she says.

Roger Diamond is a Pacific Palisades attorney and a founding member of No Oil. While time and endless battles have forced others to retire, Diamond stays on. His children, infants when he began the fight, are now old enough to vote against oil drilling in November.

The argument that No Oil is elitist is "a clever campaign ploy but it is simply not true," Diamond says. "The people who use the beaches are the people from the inner city, the minorities, so I think their interests are more at stake than the residents'."

Yet there does seem to be a feeling in parts of the rest of Los Angeles that the Westside is more equal than other parts of the city. The phrase "the Westside" has come to mean more than a geographic area of the city. It has come, in recent years, to represent a certain way of life led by what many see as a privileged class of people.

In the early '70s, Mar Vista, for example, was a modest name for a still-modest neighborhood. So were Westwood or—south of Wilshire Boulevard—Baja Westwood, and West Los Angeles. Nobody said they lived on the Westside. But, as prices of small tract homes skyrocketed, this vast area of flatlands became more fashionable. A style developed: trendy restaurants serving high-priced, tiny portions of food; expensive outfits to wear to aerobics classes; first-run movies exclusively in Westwood, gourmet supermarkets.

More important, the area became a dominant power in politics. More and more wealthy people lived there, including many entertainment-industry leaders. Many were Democrats, a substantial number loyal to the the liberal tradition of their Jewish heritage. They became a major financial support of the Democratic Party, which controls the offices—local and congressional—in the liberal city of Los Angeles. Their wealth supported Democratic campaigns in predominantly black South-Central Los Angeles and on the Latino Eastside. Mayor Bradley's election in 1973, and his subsequent campaigns, owed much to Westside financial support. Bradley, with his home base in South-Central and his backing on the Westside, came to symbolize the black-Jewish coalition in the city's politics.

But the growing wealth and power bred resentment. Blacks were angry when Westside Jewish leaders demanded in 1985 that the mayor denounce Black Muslim minister Louis Farrakhan, feeling that the mayor should not have to take orders from his Westside financial backers. Some Westside political leaders were put off by black support for the Jackson presidential campaign, especially after the ugly exchange between New York City Mayor Ed Koch and Jackson during this year's New York primary.

The most recent flare-up occurred when a young woman was shot to death Jan. 30 on the streets of Westwood. The police department quickly deployed more police officers in the area. And the City Council, especially Yaroslavsky, who represents Westwood, responded by offering a $10,000 reward for the suspects in the shooting. Residents and representatives of other parts of the city, particularly South-Central L.A., were angry. They contended that their neighborhoods are subject to such violence all the time and that they don't receive special treatment from the city.

By this year, the Westside, its affluent way of life and its political power had become an attractive target for Occidental and its campaign team.

To Legal Aid's Blasi, Occidental's decision to campaign against the Palisades and Westside "elitists" is a tactic born

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of necessity. "To me it looks like a straightforward lawyer-politician approach to getting the job done," he says. "You look at Occidental. You look at their strategy in terms of going into [minority areas] and . . . trying to make it a rich-vs.-poor issue and trying to appeal to a base, trying to create a base around something that is not their natural constituency. I don't think Occidental Petroleum has ever been viewed as the vanguard of social reform. . . . It is just an oil company, doing what any smart set of people would do, which is build a counterforce to the existing opposition to it."

FOOT SOLDIERS IN THE FIGHT

STEPPING INTO THE overheated political atmosphere are teams of campaign consultants for both sides who are experts in the negative tactics so popular in politics.

Preparing the television and radio commercials for the oil-drilling campaign is Robert Shrum, a former speech writer for Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass), who is also, this year, working on Lt. Gov. Leo T. McCarthy's campaign for the U.S. Senate. Shrum is an expert at fashioning hard-hitting images for the television screen. One of his most notable accomplishments was guiding Sen. Alan Cranston to a victory two years ago over Republican Ed Zschau, at that time a relatively unknown Northern California congressman. A young, successful high-tech businessman, Zschau was considered to have an excellent chance to defeat the aging Cranston. However, in a brilliant first strike, Shrum aired commercials that painted an unfavorable picture of the obscure Zschau before the Republican got started. The Zschau that Shrum introduced to Californians was a political waffler, an image of indecision that Zschau never quite shook.

Each week, Kantor, Shrum, press specialist Cerrell, direct-mail expert Richard Lichtenstein and pollster Richard Maullin meet to plan strategy. They are joined by East Los Angeles campaign manager George Pla, in charge of Latino strategy; black-community campaign manager Rod Wright and David Mixner, who is handling the effort in the gay community.

Pla, Wright and Mixner have important roles in targeting messages to communities that might be susceptible to the pro-drilling appeal. For example, in news releases to Latino newspapers, such as La Opinion, "We're trying to talk about the [economic] benefits to the Hispanic community, to minorities, to people on the Eastside" Cerrell says.

On the anti-drilling side, Berman and D'Agostino are experts in political advertisements sent through the mail to accentuate the negative side of their opponents. Their television commercials, while lacking the polish of Shrum's work, are similarly hard-hitting. When the campaign began, the small community of contributors, campaigners, camp followers and journalists who immerse themselves in the tactical side of politics was awaiting the confrontation between Shrum and the Berman-D'Agostino combine as one of the great match-ups of low-down campaigning. Publication of the BAD memo, whoever was responsible for the leak, weakened the anti-drilling side. Not enough, however, to force the campaign to dump BAD, skilled at the direct-mail

campaigning needed to win this election.

JUST WHAT IS AT STAKE?

FOR OCCIDENTAL, a lot is riding on the outcome. As the company tries to set the agenda with its class-oriented campaign, and free-swinging consultants carry the message, one result is certain: This is a campaign that will avoid or miss the point—it is a profit-making deal for Occidental.

Some of Occidental's foes play down the amount of oil in the field. Over the years, they have charged repeatedly that the project is an ego trip for the company's famous chairman, Armand Hammer: The doctor, a winner at art collecting and international business deals, can't stand losing a fight in his hometown. But geology suggests otherwise. Company experts have estimated that there are 60 million barrels of oil in the field. That is not big by world standards: Prudhoe Bay in Alaska, for example, has 9 billion barrels. But at the current price of $16 a barrel, the field, if it is as large as the company believes, would bring Occidental $960 million over a 20-year period. The take would be much larger if, as industry experts believe, the current oil glut ends and prices increase before the turn of the century. The field is, Occidental geologists say, an extension of a geological formation that underlies the oil-rich Westside. Following that formation several years ago, they discovered a profitable drilling site at the Veterans Hospital in West Los Angeles after another company had given it up.

Arthur Groman is a senior partner in the old Los Angeles law firm of Mitchell, Silberberg & Knupp. He helped Hammer take over Occidental when it was an anemic $32,000-a-year moneymaker in 1957 and is now on the oil firm's board of directors. Sitting in his law office, in a building just across the Trident Center from the high-rise housing Kantor's firm, the longtime Hammer ally scoffs at the notion that Hammer is merely satisfying his ego. "Don Quixote he is not. I have been his lawyer for 30 years, and if there is a practical man, it is Dr. Hammer."

A practical man and a practical campaign. But, how will it affect the social and political landscape of a city in transition? Those interviewed did not think the pro-Occidental committee's efforts will actually pit race against race in this comparatively peaceful city. What disturbs some neutral observers, such as Gary Blasi, is that it touches off a social debate over what is basically a bottom-line financial transaction for an oil company. To Blasi, this campaign is a distraction from bigger, harder-to-solve problems facing the new Los Angeles—problems arising from what he feels is a growing gap between rich and poor.

"It seems to me there are some areas of potential allegiance between those sectors of Los Angeles. And to the extent that Occidental and others, for short-term, cynical reasons, can exploit that and drive wedges between people, I think that does a tremendous amount of damage to the political fabric of the city with no particular gain," he says. "It would be one thing if Occidental was going to take all the profits from this oil and put them into critical human services. Then, there would be no question of where I would stand."